

# 2004 Virginia Boater’s Quick Reference Guide

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT	Boat Type or Length			
	PWC	less than 16 ‘	16’ to less than 26	26’ to 65’
Boating Education Certificate	✓	Recommended		
PFD – Type I, II III, or V wearable for each person	✓	✓	✓	✓
PFD – throwable (seat cushion/ring buoy)		✓	✓	✓
Fire Extinguishers (if certain conditions exist)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cut-off Safety Device	✓	Recommended		
Flame Arrestor (gasoline inboard engines)		✓	✓	✓
Ventilation System		✓	✓	✓
Muffler	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sound Producing Device	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visual Distress – Daytime – coastal waters	Recommend		✓	✓
Visual Distress – Nighttime – coastal waters		✓	✓	✓
Navigation Lights		✓	✓	✓

## PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs)

At least one (1) US Coast Guard (USCG) approved **wearable** Type I, II, III or V PFD is required for each person onboard. PFD must be the correct size for the intended wearer and in good, serviceable condition.

At least one (1) USCG approved Type IV **throwable** (ring buoy OR seat cushion), per boat, is required on all recreational boats regardless of size, in ADDITION to the wearable PFD required for each person onboard. Does not apply to personal watercraft (PWC), canoes, kayaks and inflatable rafts

Inflatable PFDs may be used by anyone at least 16 years of age, except while onboard a PWC, being towed, or paddeling in white water (see labeling information).

## PROPER STOWAGE OF PFDs

Each required Type I, II, or III *wearable* PFD must be readily accessible. “Readily accessible” means the PFDs are stowed where they can be easily reached, or are out in the open ready for wear. Readily accessible PFDs cannot be in protective coverings or under lock and key.

Type V (hybrid device) PFD must be worn according to the manufacturer label to meet carriage requirements.

Each Type IV *throwable* PFD must be immediately available. “Immediately available” means the PFD shall be quickly reachable in an emergency situation. An immediately available PFD cannot be in a protective covering, in a closed compartment or under other equipment.

## SERVICEABLE CONDITION OF PFD

A PFD is considered to be in serviceable condition only if it does not exhibit deterioration that could diminish the performance of the PFD.

## NO WAKE

No wake is defined as “the slowest possible speed required to maintain steerage and headway”. All watercraft operators must maintain “no wake” operation when within 50 feet or less of docks, piers, boathouses, boat ramps, and people in the water.

## UNSAFE PRACTICES

It is unlawful to allow any person to ride or sit on the bow, gunwales, transom, or on the decking over the bow of the vessel while under power unless such motorboat is provided with adequate guards or railing to prevent passengers from falls overboard. Passengers or other persons aboard a watercraft may occupy these areas of the vessel to moor or anchor the watercraft, to cast off, or for any other necessary purpose.

## SLACKEN SPEED

Operators shall reduce speed to avoid endangering persons or property by the effect of the motorboat's wake when approaching or passing vessels under way, lying to, at anchor, or made fast to the shore; or when approaching or passing piers, docks, or boathouses; or when approaching or passing persons in the water or using water skis or surfboards.

**SAFE SPEED**

A safe speed is a speed less than the maximum at which the operator can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and stop within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions.

In establishing a safe operating speed, the operator shall take into account: visibility, traffic density, ability to maneuver the vessel (stopping distance and turning ability), background light at night, proximity of navigational hazards, draft of the vessel, limitations of radar equipment, and the state of wind, sea and current.

**ACCIDENT REPORTING**

Operator must report any accident involving \$2000.00 or more in damages, complete loss of a vessel, injuries to any person requiring treatment greater than first aid or the death or disappearance of any person.

When an accident occurs that requires a written report, the operator shall notify the Department of Game & Inland Fisheries (DGIF) or the most immediately available game warden, of: the following information:

- The date, time, and exact location of the occurrence;
- The major details of the accident including the name of each person who died or disappeared;
- The number and name of the vessel; and
- The names and addresses of the owner and operator.
- When the operator of a vessel cannot give the notice required by the foregoing, each person on board the vessel shall notify DGIF.

**PERSONAL WATERCRAFT**

**Who May Operate** The minimum age to operate a PWC is 16 years of age. However, those 14 or 15 years old, who carry proof of passing an approved boating safety education course, may operate these craft. Proof of education must be presented to a law enforcement officer upon request.

**Time of Operation** PWCs may only be operated between sunrise and sunset.

**Passengers** PWCs may carry only the number of people designated by the manufacturer.

**No Wake** PWC operators must maintain “no wake” operation when within 50 feet or less of docks, piers, boathouses, boat ramps, people in the water, **and vessels other than other PWCs.**

**Reckless Operation** Reckless operation of a PWC includes: (1) weaving through other vessels which are underway, stopped, moored, or anchored, while exceeding a reasonable speed; (2) following another vessel or skier, crossing the path of another vessel, or jumping the wake of another vessel more closely than is reasonable and prudent; (3) crossing between the towing vessel and a skier; or (4) steering toward an object or person and turning sharply in order to spray or attempt to spray an object or person with the wash or jet spray of the PWC.

**Steering** PWCs ***WILL NOT*** steer when the throttle is released or the engine is cut-off.

**Personal Floatation Devices** Everyone on, or being towed by a PWC must wear a USCG-approved life jacket. Inflatables are prohibited.

**Fire Extinguisher** Every PWC must be equipped with a USCG-approved fire extinguisher in good and serviceable condition.

**Cut-Off Lanyard** If the PWC was manufactured with a cut-off safety device, the operator must attach the safety lanyard to their person, clothing or PFD.

**SOUND PRODUCING DEVICE**

All boats, including PWCs, need an efficient sound signaling device. Example: whistle, electric horn, or portable air horn.

**SKIING**

Those being pulled (skiing, tubing, wakeboarding, etc.) by a boat must wear an approved PFD unless there is a person on the boat, in addition to the operator, who is in a position to observe the progress of the skier(s).

**MUFFLING DEVICE**

The exhaust of an internal combustion engine on any motorboat shall be effectively muffled. The muffling device shall exhaust at or below the water line or it shall be equipped with mechanical baffles. The use of cutouts is prohibited.

**FIRE EXTINGUISHERS**

One approved USCG approved B-I fire extinguisher is required on gasoline powered boats less than 26 feet having installed fuel tanks, closed living spaces, or areas where vapors can be trapped.

Vessels 26’ in length to less than 40’ need 2 B-I or 1 B-2 approved fire extinguishers and vessels 40’ to 65’ need 3 B-I or 1 B-2 and 1 B-1 (see label for ratings). A fixed fire extinguishing system equals 1 B-I portable fire extinguisher.

**BACKFIRE FLAME ARRESTOR**

All vessels with inboard gasoline engines must be equipped with an approved backfire flame arrestor that is securely fastened.

**VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS (VDS)**

Vessels 16 feet or more in length are required to carry VDS while operating on the **coastal waters** up to a point where the water narrows to less than 2 miles wide. Boats may carry devices suitable for day use and devices suitable for night use, or devices suitable for both day and night use. Between sunset and sunrise, VDS suitable for night use must be on board boats less than 16 feet while in coastal waters.

**VENTILATION**

Ventilation is required on most all boats which have a gasoline engine, installed fuel tank(s) or both. Before starting engine, operate blower at least 4 minutes and check engine compartment bilge for gasoline vapors.

**MARINE SANITATION DEVICES (MSD)**

Vessels with installed marine toilets must have an installed MSD. Pump-out stations are available at most marinas. It is a criminal violation of law to pump sewage into Virginia waters.

**NAVIGATION RULES**

**Meeting** - When two power-driven vessels are meeting head-on, or nearly so, each vessel shall turn to its starboard (right) side and pass with the other vessel on its port (left) side. When two powerboats are meeting head-to-head, or nearly so, neither is the stand-on vessel.

**Crossing** - When two power-driven vessels are approaching at right angles or nearly so, the motorboat on the starboard (right) side is the stand-on vessel. The other boat, the give-way vessel, shall keep clear by directing its course to starboard (right) and passing astern of the stand-on vessel, or if necessary, by slowing, stopping or reversing.

**Overtaking** - When two boats are running in the same direction, and the vessel astern desires to pass, you are in an overtaking situation. A boat approaching another boat from the stern and overtaking it shall keep out of the way of the overtaken vessel. The vessel being overtaken shall hold its course and speed.

**Power-driven vessels must stay out of the way of sailboats.**

**Navigation Lights** Proper navigation lights must be displayed from sunset to sunrise and during periods of reduced visibility

**DUTY TO STOP AND RENDER ASSISTANCE**

Every boat operator involved in a marine accident must stop and render assistance as may be practicable to minimize the effects of the accident. Name, address and vessel identification must be given to injured persons and/or the operator of the other vessel.

**REGISTRATION AND TITLING**

All motorboats, regardless of length and horsepower of motor are defined as watercraft.

A ***certificate of title*** and a ***certificate of number*** (registration card) are required for all watercraft propelled by machinery, including gasoline, diesel and electric motors. A certificate of title is also required for sail-powered vessels in excess of 18 feet in length.

You must have at least a "temporary" certificate of number or a "temporary" registration certificate on board before your watercraft can legally be operated on Virginia waters. Upon receipt, the "Permanent" certificate of numbers must be signed and carried on board while the watercraft is being operated.

The numbers issued to your watercraft appears in the certificate of number and is to be displayed on both sides of the bow of the vessel in block letters, at least 3" in height, properly separated, and contrasting in color to the hull or background. A current, valid registration decal must be displayed within 6" of the registration number.

Serial number, make and horsepower of motors in excess of 25 horsepower must be provided with an application for title and registration. Call the registration hotline at 1-877-898-2628 for more information.

**ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND RECKLESS OPERATION**

Virginia law prohibits the operation of a boat by an operator with blood alcohol concentrations of .08 percent or more by weight, by volume.

“Implied Consent” states that by operating a boat, the operator is agreeing to submit to a breath and/or blood test to determine the amount of alcohol and/or drugs in your blood.

"Zero Tolerance" prohibits persons younger than 21 from consuming alcohol and operating a watercraft with any measurable alcohol level.

**THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

Nuisance aquatic species, such as zebra mussels and hydrilla, can spread quickly, replace native species and damage water resources. Properly cleaning boats and equipment after each use can prevent the spread of invasive marine species.

Submersed aquatic vegetation (or SAV) are underwater plants often found in shallow (usually less than 6 feet) areas. They are important habitat for fish and shellfish, particularly the blue crab, and are a food source for several waterfowl species. Scientific studies have shown that SAV beds can be scarred by boat propellers or by larger craft if they run aground. When operating your boat in shallow areas, particularly at low tide, be careful to avoid damaging SAV.

Stay 50 feet away from dolphins and 300 feet from whales.

**Boat Smart from the Start – Wear your Life Jacket & Don’t Drink & Boat!**  
**Be Responsible, Be Safe, Have Fun! · Take a Boating Safety Course**

This program received Federal financial assistance from the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund. Under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to:  
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The boating laws and regulations contained in this publication summarize basic laws and regulations for which a Virginia boater is responsible. Additional and more in-depth rules apply regarding various types of allowable operation. It is the responsibility of the boater to know and follow all applicable rules.